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ABSTRACT

A project to promote role change for department heads in South African universities is discussed. Unique characteristics of universities in Southern Africa are also identified, including the fact that department heads have only limited decentralized authority over issues such as admission, personnel policy, and finances. Project goals were as follows: to encourage and support a group of department heads in analyzing and restructuring their posts as department heads at the University of Orange Free State (UOFS), to encourage and support this group of department heads to decide on and participate in a structured development program, and to determine the results of such an effort. Forty-three department heads participated in the 3-year project. Information is provided on the scope of the investigation, which included questionnaire administration and interviews, as well as problems that occurred during the implementation of the project. Appended materials include a chart of a conceptual model for operational management on the departmental level at UOFS, and an outline of modules for developing leadership and management skills of department heads. (SW)

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University Education in a Developing Country: The Revolution in the Role of a Department Head

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The Revolution in the Role of a Department Head

THE ASSOCIATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

This paper was presented at the Twenty-Fourth Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held at the Hyatt-Regency in Fort Worth, Texas, May 6-9, 1984. This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC Collection of Forum papers.

Daniel R. Coleman, Chairman
Forum Publication
Advisory Committee

Abstract

The Republic of South Africa can be regarded as a developing country. No university in this country has thus far offered a formal training program for its department heads on whose roles as leaders in and managers of departments the success of a university largely seems to depend. Management at departmental level is an integral and important part of the university system, but managerial principles and practices implemented successfully in other spheres, do not necessarily lead to success in an academic framework. This project has been undertaken to determine the leadership and managerial role of a head of an academic department and to gather data with a view to establishing a developmental program by means of which leadership and management can be promoted and improved.

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN A DEVELOPING COUNTRY: THE REVOLUTION IN THE ROLE OF A DEPARTMENT HEAD

Introduction

In the title of this paper the revolution in the role of department heads in a developing country is emphasized. It is therefore important first of all, to explain which factors will influence the role of a department head in a developing country in a different way than in a developed country.

Universities in Africa, and particularly in Southern Africa, to a great extent bear a Western European (British included) hallmark as a result of the colonial era. After political independence had been gained, the universities mainly kept to the Western European model. A gradual shift of emphasis came about during the 1970s.

During the past two decades special attention was given at various conferences on education to the university in the context of Africa, for example the Conference of African States on the Development of Education in Africa (Addis Ababa, 1961), the Conference on the Development of Higher Education in Africa (Tanararive, 1962), the Conference on Education and Scientific and Technical Training in Relation to Development in Africa (Nairobi, 1968), the Conference of Ministers of African Member States Responsible for Application of Science and Technology to Development (Dakar, 1974), the Committee of Experts on the Recognition in the African States (Accra, 1975), and the Conference of Ministers of Education of African Member States (Lagos,

1976). The highest priority of many different conferences in African states through the 60's and 70's was the creation or strengthening of national universities (Unesco, 1976, p. 22).

At the beginning of the 1970s criticism against the traditional had been building up, and the irrelevancy of all the aspects of the typical African university with respect to the needs of the countries had been pointed out directly and clearly. An important discussion about Creating the African University: Emerging Issues of the 1970s was held in Accra in 1972 under the auspices of the Association of African Universities, during which a new philosophy was sought for the African university, in which the inspiration, ideals and aspirations of Africa would be voiced.

A working group that met in Accra in 1972 held the following six main functions as ideal for the African university:

1. Pursuit, promotion and dissemination of knowledge
2. Research
3. Provision of intellectual leadership
4. Manpower development
5. Promoting social and economic modernization
6. Promoting inter-continental unity and international understanding.

Together with this the leadership role and the facilitation of leadership in the community were emphasized strongly.

Department heads as leaders and managers at universities in Southern Africa should be judged against this background.

Universities in Southern Africa are fine examples of what happens in a developing country where some older universities are strongly developed while others are still in a phase of getting established. The following unique characteristics however can be found in most of the universities in Southern Africa.

1. Universities receive government aid (subsidies of 75 per cent to 100 per cent). Therefore, bureaucratic pressure (legislative restrictions) is a problem which constantly receives attention of the Government and universities, especially during the phase of establishment of a university.

2. Strongly centralized management systems are functioning at universities, and with a very few exceptions, department heads have only limited decentralized authority over issues such as the admission of students, policy regarding staff, and finances. The department head has more academic freedom regarding curriculum and research design and development, but it still cannot be compared with the academic freedom, for example, given to department heads at most universities in highly developed countries.

3. Contributions in the form of donations, grants, and the funding of projects from the private sector for instruction and research, are limited. "Soft money", to a certain extent, implies more room for manoeuvring, but also brings more responsibilities for department heads.

4. The office (post) of a department head at most universities is a permanent one (department heads are tenured) without formal evaluation; or a department head

chairs an academic department for three to five years without formal evaluation.

5. Students have little say in the management structure of an academic department.

6. Junior lecturers, researchers, academic assistants and administrative staff have a limited say in matters concerning leadership and management in a department.

7. The departmental structures do not differentiate clearly between education, research, community service and administrative tasks.

8. All the full-time members of departments are appointed permanently, with extremely limited formal evaluation of their activities.

9. The salaries of department heads do not exceed those of ordinary professors despite additional administrative responsibilities.

10. All university posts have fixed salary scales according to which the minimum and maximum salaries of personnel are determined. Incentives for the achievements of faculty are limited, inter alia because of limited external funding, and because government subsidies do not, at this stage, make provision for incentives of this kind in a personnel development system. Provision is made for remunerations only within the framework of salary scales and the general budget or formulae for research and facilities.

11. Due to the serious lack of high level manpower in all sectors, including academic staff and especially department heads, the latter in general have less knowledge and experience than their counterparts in universities in

developed countries and a far less developed infrastructure to lead and manage in.

Except for the above-mentioned problems department heads at universities in Southern Africa also have to deal with typical changes in the organizational structures, as mentioned a decade ago in a Report for the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education on the University as an Organization (1973).

From this report the change of the last decade can be summarized thus:

Strengthening of central administrations

Declining professorial power

Growing student influence

Emerging systems of higher education

Broadening of higher education

(Perkins, 1973).

Bearing the above-mentioned background in mind, and knowing that no university has thus far offered a formal training program for its department heads on whose roles in the very important operating core of the universities the success of a university largely seems to depend, the BUE (Bureau for University Education) decided to launch a development research project in this field. Managerial principles and practices implemented successfully in other spheres, however do not necessarily lead to success in an academic framework, therefore a literature study on management in higher education had to be done and a research project had to be undertaken that would specifically consi-

der the unique circumstances of the University of the Orange Free State (UOFS) in Southern Africa.

The Formulation of Goals

The Goals of the Project

The goals of the project were: (a) to encourage and support a group of department heads in analysing and restructuring their posts as department heads at the University of the Orange Free State (hereafter UOFS); (b) to encourage and support this group of department heads to decide on and participate in a structured development program; and (c) to determine the results of such an effort.

Orientation to and perspectives on the goals of the project. Leadership and management have been described as the utilization of physical and human resources through co-ordinative efforts, and it is accomplished by performing the functions of planning, organizing, staffing, delegating, directing and controlling. This may seem an easy task, but academic heads of departments are appointed by virtue of their academic performance and achievements, and very often they find themselves in a role for which they have no training, a role which very often is not even described clearly.

Leadership and management have become crucial elements in effective higher education. Today the emphasis, especially in developing countries, is on fewer, but better leaders and managers. In these turbulent and financially hard-pressed times, people occupying these positions cannot afford uncertainty about what they should do, why they

should do it, when they should do it, where they should do it and how they should go about doing it.

A group of department heads at the UOFS expressed their agreement about this concern and were prepared to partake in a three-year project in this respect.

Methodology

Approach

A controlled, experimental research design was not possible in this project for obvious reasons. In planning the project preference was given to a development approach. In view of the exceptional nature of the situational factors and the extent of the variables, process aims were strived after rather than product aims, with the emphasis on:

uniqueness of the situation;

qualitative data;

internal validity;

implementation possibilities; and

operational value to the UOFS.

Consultants and occasional researchers specializing in management were used to a limited extent in the planning and pilot phases of the project, and the author and co-author made study tours in the Republic of South Africa (RSA) as well as overseas to ensure that the background survey was done as completely as possible.

Participants

The participating group of 43 department heads represented 36 per cent of the department heads at the UOFS. The participants were not selected at random, but were invited to take part in the project. The following criteria were applied:

1. The department head should previously have worked with the Bureau for University Education (BUE) in some way or other.

2. All schools had to be represented.

3. Participation was voluntary.

4. No additional support was given to participating department heads - neither financial nor in terms of time.

The reasons why department heads withdrew during the course of the project were checked out carefully. The most important reasons were: (a) lack of time/staff/funds, (b) non-availability due to overseas studies, extended absence from the campus, termination of employment at the UOFS, and (c) lack of interest in the project.

Method

Objectives of the investigation. In conducting this developmental research project the following objectives were pursued:

1. Sensitizing or "defrosting" of the participants, in order to emphasize the importance of and the need for the development of leadership and management skills;

2. to satisfy the identified needs of the participants through the implementation of structured interventions; and

3. to evaluate the effects of the total process on the functioning/behaviour of the participants.

Implementation. The objectives of the investigation were achieved by taking the following steps of action over a period of 3 years:

1. The implementation of an unstructured questionnaire to determine what the role and functions of the participa-

ting department heads were. This questionnaire was completed by 28 of the 43 participants.

2. The completion of a structured questionnaire by department heads in order to clarify the data elicited by means of the unstructured questionnaire. This structured questionnaire was based on the one Lonsdale (1982) used to identify the administrative tasks and professional needs of heads of academic departments in colleges for advanced education in Australia, and was adapted for purposes of the local survey. Apart from the biographical information that was thus gathered, seven categories of functions were used to clarify the roles and tasks of 31 department heads.

3. The researchers paid visits to South African universities, and the content of the identified roles and the functions of department heads were tested during interviews with administrators. The interviews were conducted on the basis of questions that were put to them beforehand. The two basic questions were: (a) Do you have a clearly-structured task description for department heads at your university? (b) Does a definite need for professional development of department heads exist at your university?

4. Developmental needs as seen by the UOFS top-structure (rector, vice-rectors, deans) were determined by using the Delphi technique.

5. The implementation of a pre-intervention and post-intervention questionnaire. The instrument (adapted from Rasmusen, 1978) that was used was designed and tested and refined through trial runs. Responses were obtained on three different levels, namely from the deans, from the de-

partment heads themselves, and from the members of the various departments.

6. Two structured interventions took place: one on planning at departmental level and the other on professional development in an academic department. The latter was coupled with the implementation of a sensitizing questionnaire (Litwin & Stringer, 1968, as adapted) about organization and management atmosphere in a department.

7. Follow-up sessions for individuals during which the vice-chancellor of the UOFS and the researchers provided assistance and guidance.

8. A consolidation meeting at which examples of progress in various departments were discussed.

Implementation problems. During the implementation process the following serious problems came to light:

1. The duration of the project (three years), the additional burden caused by participation (shortage of staff and funds), and the fact that the benefits of taking part were not perceivable on the short term, caused the participants to become discouraged and unmotivated.

2. The large number of variables involved (for example, the pressure from the top-structure for meaningful change, the identification of priorities regarding planning in schools by deans, the development opportunities outside the project with other consultants and associations, pressure from scientific and professional fields, developments in the management core of the university, and so forth) had an influence on the outcomes of the project.

3. Serious problems that had to be coped with, had to do with the collection of completed questionnaires, suitable times for intervention (a particular intervention sometimes had to be repeated twice or even three times for various groups of participants), changes in the department staff (due to resignations, new appointments, and so forth) and the withdrawal of department heads from the project.

4. The divergent views department heads had of their roles and functions, caused meaningful problems with the interpretation of the data (especially those elicited from the unstructured questionnaire), and the total absence of a common frame of reference on leadership and management was noticeable.

5. In connection with the group of department heads from the Medical School it was obvious that:(a) the interests of the school, rather than those of the different departments enjoyed preference in the decisions to take part in the project, (b) a number of the participants took part as result of pressure, and not because they themselves felt a need for development, and (c) the spectrum of progress was extensive within one school (some of the departments have already made good progress with issues like departmental planning and staff development, while others have not even started working in those fields).

6. The delicate balance between an approach based purely on needs and a scientific management structure and research design had to be retained throughout to prevent a situation of mere reactionary conduct.

7. No consultants specializing in the field of management and leadership in the university context are available in the RSA. The consultants that were involved in the project, were approached on the grounds of subject related backgrounds and successes as consultants in the private sector.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

With the information gathered by means of the evaluation instruments as basis, the following conclusions were reached (the follow-up sessions with individual department heads were considered as process-evaluation used to give direction to the survey process, and were not taken into account in the terminal evaluation).

Biographical data. From the biographical data obtained from the participants in the project it could be derived that the partaking department heads were relatively young, had little administrative experience, had many other tasks except those related to leadership and management and that their departments were relatively small - an average of five faculty and six non-academic positions.

Unstructured questionnaire. From this questionnaire it was concluded that many differences occurred concerning the views of department heads of their jobs. Indistinct descriptions were common. It was obvious that the questionnaire had the effect of facilitating second thoughts with department heads as to their exact jobs.

Structured questionnaire. This questionnaire increased the awareness of the partaking department heads to the scope

of their jobs. Additionally it had the effect of department heads discovering "new" job-related tasks which generated developmental needs like, for instance, communication skills, staff development skills, problemsolving skills and knowledge of delegation.

Compared to the results of the unstructured questionnaire, the following discrepancies and congruencies were obvious:

1. Staff management became more important as a job-related task.

2. Teaching and research were still rated very important.

3. Representing the department, departmental planning and control gained in emphasis.

Interviews at seven South African universities. Interviews with members of the top-structures, deans and department heads of seven (out of 19) South African universities emphasized much indistinctness and uncertainty concerning the job of the department head. General conclusions were: (a) The role of the head of a department involves, inter alia, the management of teaching and research activities, (b) the management of teaching and research activities is also referred to as "academic leadership", and (c) the professional development of staff as an administrative task does not carry the emphasis at most other universities that it does at the UOFS.

Identification of development priorities. One of the aims of the structured questionnaire was to identify the development needs of the partaking department heads. At

least five areas were identified as priorities, with the two most prominent those of skills relating to planning and skills regarding staff development.

These priorities were confirmed by the participating department heads during a session at which possible interventions were discussed.

Development priorities as indicated by the top-structure and deans of the UOFS. Priorities indicated by this group differed considerably from those identified by the department heads. These differences, which usually occur between supervisors and subordinates, were expected. The priorities expressed by the department heads were, however, not ignored by the top-structure and deans - it appeared only as lesser priorities.

Pre- and post-implementation results. The results of the questionnaire used as a pre- and post-evaluation instrument indicated (a) that there was a meaningful rise (0,61 on a 7-point scale) in the level of what was expected from department heads by both their deans and the members of their departments, and (b) that there was only a modest rise (0,013 on a 7-point scale) in the level of the actual functioning of department heads as observed by their deans and subordinates.

Summary based on the results. This project stimulated thinking and initiatives on various levels and in various fields at the UOFS. The direct involvement of a number of department heads, and indirect involvement of staff members of departments, deans and members of the top-structure resulted inter alia, in various other projects on leadership

and management at the UOFS. Examples of such projects are:

1. The members of the top-structure have begun to view their leadership and management positions with a more critical eye than before, and began motivating a new approach to leadership and management at the UOFS.

2. Deans evaluated their positions more critically, and initiated extensive planning actions in their schools.

3. Department heads who were not involved in the project, started to experiment with management issues on an individual basis.

Recommendations

In view of the results of the research project, the following recommendations can be made:

1. The University of the Orange Free State (UOFS) should consider to include in its policy a stipulation according to which it will be a condition of employment of the University Council, that every newly-appointed department head will undertake to participate in a selected and individualized development program. The content of this program will be determined in accordance with the results of this project and will be adapted to the knowledge, experience and needs of individual department heads. Department heads who are in those positions already, should be motivated by all possible means to participate in the program on a voluntary basis. The successful completion of the program will, firstly, be considered as a criterion for a permanent appointment. Secondly, incentives will have to be provided if a department head and his departmental staff perform successfully as result of the department head's

efficiency and effectiveness in his role as leader and manager.

2. The UOFS should consider to include in its policy guide-lines for leadership and management on strategic, functional and operational levels, in order to ensure the maintenance of a systematic and comprehensive leadership and management process (the linking-elements process).

3. The introduction of an operational management structure (cf. Table 1), coupled with a development program (Table 2), should be considered not only at the UOFS, but also at other South African universities, and the implementation of such a program should be investigated in collaboration with the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the Committee of University Principals (CUP). In view of this, financial and other support is seeked (full particulars available from authors).

4. There should constantly be active cooperation with established institutions like the Center for Leadership Development and Academic Administration (American Council on Education, USA) and other similar institutions in order to constantly strive after improvement of the quality of a development program.

Table 1

A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT ON DEPARTMENTAL LEVEL AT THE UOFS

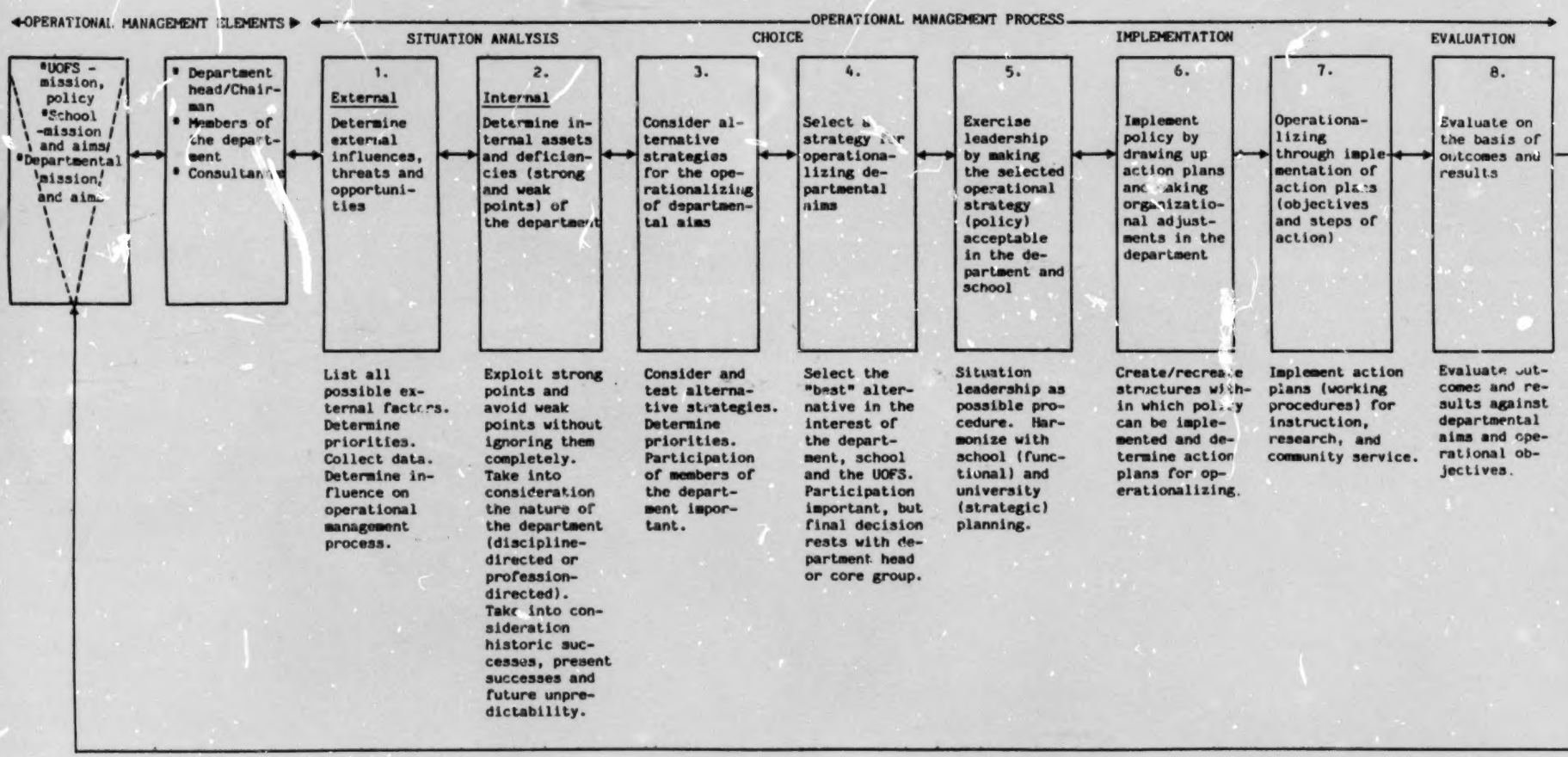
OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT ELEMENTS
OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT PROCESS
SITUATION ANALYSIS
CHOICE
IMPLEMENTATION
EVALUATION
*UOFS - mission, policy
*School -mission and aims/
*Departmental mission, and aims
* Department head/Chairman
* Members of the department
* Consultants
1. External
Determine external influences, threats and opportunities
2. Internal
Determine internal assets and deficiencies (strong and weak points) of the department
3.
Consider alternative strategies for the operationalizing of departmental aims
4.
Select a strategy for operationalizing departmental aims
5.
Exercise leadership by making the selected operational strategy (policy) acceptable in the department and school
6.
Implement policy by drawing up action plans and making organizational adjustments in the department
7.
Operationalizing through implementation of action plans (objectives and steps of action)
8.
Evaluate on the basis of outcomes and results
List all possible external factors. Determine priorities. Collect data. Determine influence on operational management process.
Exploit strong points and avoid weak points without ignoring them completely. Take into consideration the nature of the department (discipline-directed or profession-directed). Take into consideration historic successes, present successes and future unpredictability.
Consider and test alternative strategies. Determine priorities. Participation of members of the department important.
Select the "best" alternative in the interest of the department, school and the UOFS. Participation important, but final decision rests with department head or core group.
Situation leadership as possible procedure. Harmonize with school (functional) and university (strategic) planning.
Create/recreate structures within which policy can be implemented and determine action plans for operationalizing.
Implement action plans (working procedures) for instruction, research, and community service.
Evaluate outcomes and results against departmental aims and operational objectives.

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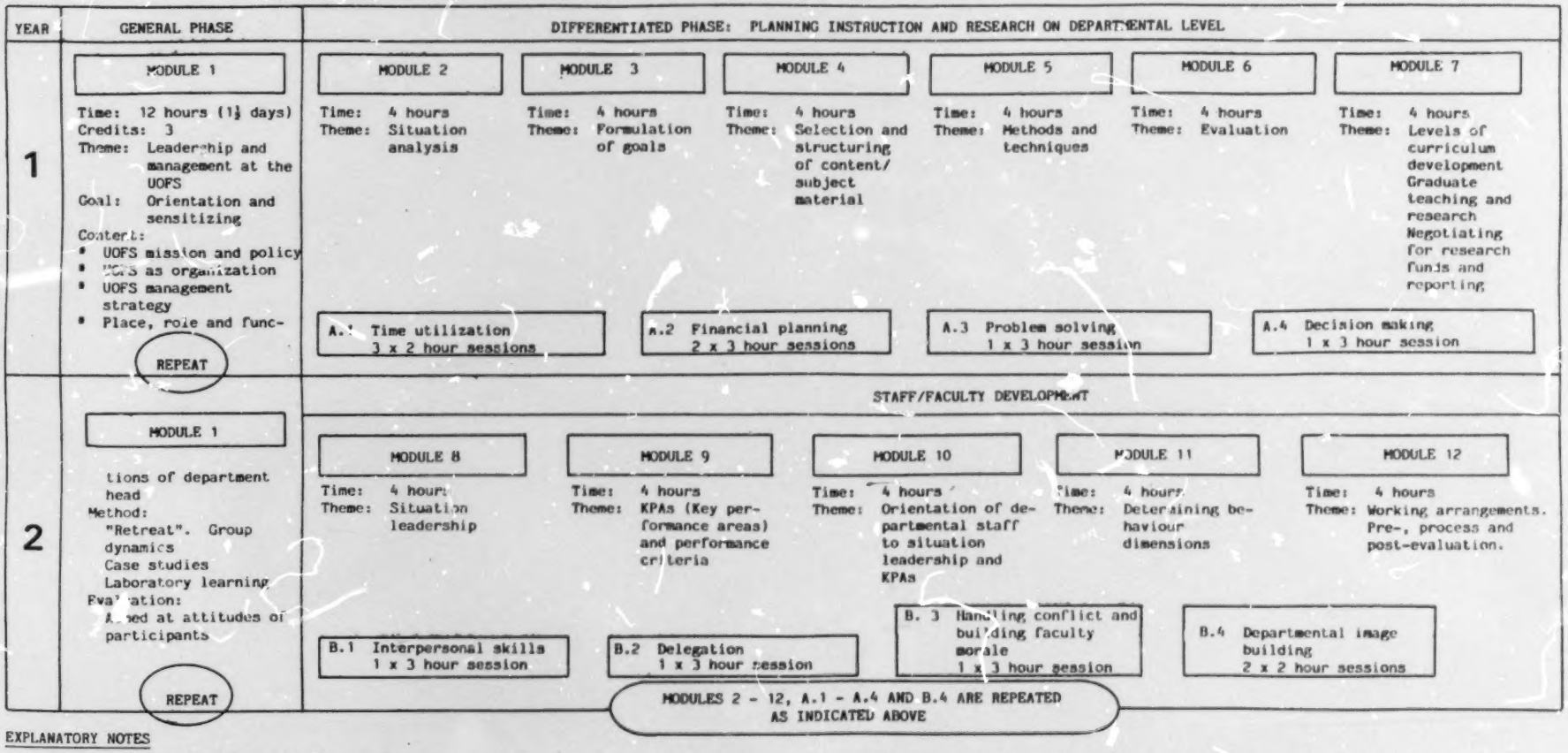
Table 2

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS


YEAR
GENERAL PHASE
DIFFERENTIATED PHASE: PLANNING INSTRUCTION AND RESEARCH ON DEPARTMENTAL LEVEL
1
MODULE 1
Time: 12 hours (1½ days)
Credits: 3
Theme: Leadership and management at the UOFS
Goal: Orientation and sensitizing
Content:
• UOFS mission and policy
• UOFS as organization
• UOFS management strategy
• Place, role and func-
REPEAT
MODULE 2
Time: 4 hours
Theme: Situation analysis
MODULE 3
Time: 4 hours
Theme: Formulation of goals
MODULE 4
Time: 4 hours
Theme: Selection and structuring of content/ subject material
MODULE 5
Time: 4 hours
Theme: Methods and techniques
MODULE 6
Time: 4 hours
Theme: Evaluation
MODULE 7
Time: 4 hours
Theme: Levels of curriculum development Graduate teaching and research Negotiating for research funds and reporting
A.1 Time utilization 3 x 2 hour sessions
A.2 Financial planning 2 x 3 hour sessions
A.3 Problem solving 1 x 3 hour session
A.4 Decision making 1 x 3 hour session
2
MODULE 1
tions of department head
Method:
"Retreat". Group dynamics
Case studies
Laboratory learning
Evaluation:
Aimed at attitudes of participants
REPEAT
STAFF/FACULTY DEVELOPMENT
MODULE 8
Time: 4 hours
Theme: Situation leadership
MODULE 9
Time: 4 hours
Theme: KPAs (Key performance areas) and performance criteria
MODULE 10
Time: 4 hours
Theme: Orientation of departmental staff to situation leadership and KPAs
MODULE 11
Time: 4 hours
Theme: Determining behaviour dimensions
MODULE 12
Time: 4 hours
Theme: Working arrangements. Pre-, process and post-evaluation.
B.1 Interpersonal skills 1 x 3 hour session
B.2 Delegation 1 x 3 hour session
B. 3 Handling conflict and building faculty morale 1 x 3 hour session
B.4 Departmental image building 2 x 2 hour sessions
MODULES 2 - 12, A.1 - A.4 AND B.4 ARE REPEATED AS INDICATED ABOVE

EXPLANATORY NOTES

1. The program is presented in a cycle of 2 years. Module 1 is repeated at the beginning of each year. Modules 2 - 12 are repeated biennially.
2. Modules 8, 10 and 11 imply contact sessions of 4 hours each. The other modules, except 1, take place on a basis of 2 hours' self-study and 2 hours' discussion. Follow-up sessions can however, be planned according to the needs of individual participants.
3. Module 1 is worth 3 credits, and the rest are worth 1 credit each. Credits are allotted on the grounds of evaluation criteria like attendance, completion of activities, and the level of knowledge and expertise mastered, and attitude.
4. Newly-appointed department heads qualify for permanent appointments (tenure) when the 14 basic credits have been obtained. Acknowledgement in terms of incentives is given for successful implementation in departments.
5. Time implications: For a department head - a minimum of approximately 56 hours in two years' time (± 7 work days); For the Bureau for University Education (BUE) and consultants - approximately 232 hours in two years' time (± 29 work days), individual follow-up sessions not included.
6. Invitations for Module 1 received by all department heads. Participation in Modules 2 - 12 is limited to 10 department heads per cycle, with preference to newly appointed department heads.
7. Department heads may participate in the program or discontinue participation according to their needs and preferences. Accreditation will, however, be computer controlled, and the program is regarded as completed only when 14 credits have been obtained.
8. Modules A.1 - A.4 and B.1 - B.4 are offered as optional development opportunities during the course of the program, and are not worth any credits, but are regarded as essential in the leadership and management equipment of a department head.

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